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ABSTRACT

Thirty-four high-risk students at Essex Community College (Maryland) were evaluated on self-concept growth as shown through pre- and post-tests on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS), self-concept as shown through an open-ended questionnaire, and improvement in college grade point average (GPA), after working in a self goal-setting learning support program for basic skills development. The program--a non-credit, individualized, programmed, laboratory experience--utilized self-defined resolution of skill deficiencies as perceived by each student, through an individual learning contract. At the conclusion of the program 25 students showed positive growth in self-concept as measured by the TSCS and all of the students indicated positive attitudes through the subjective questionnaire. Overall, the GPA's of students improved, with the majority of returning students improving their GPA from the previous semester and the majority of new students earning an overall "C" grade; of the three students whose GPA's showed a decline, two had increased their course load over that of the previous semester. It was concluded that an effective basic skills program can result in measurable positive growth in self-concepts of high-risk community college students, and that the self goal-setting learning environment can set the stage for student success. (Author/JDS)

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SELF CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT FOR HIGH RISK STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Ken Bourn

This is the second in a series of studies dealing with academic growth as influenced by improved self concept resulting from the environmental and instructional conditions. The first study in this series is available as ERIC ED 129 394.

Research done by William Purkey, Self Concept and School Achievement, 1970, points up the fact that the student's subjective and personal evaluation of himself has a dominant influence upon his success in school. Establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect provides an avenue to approach the remediation of academic weakness as emphasized by Paul Campbell's research, "School and Self Concept", Educational Leadership, 1967. One good way to carry out this therapy is simply to listen to what the student has to say, and if possible, adapt the ideas to fit the activity at hand. The instructor can further establish himself as the "significant other" who sees something worthwhile in the student's capabilities. It is important if the instructor can express trust in the student as a total individual not just as a student. The hypothesis for this study was founded in a commitment to this philosophy.

THE HYPOTHESIS

An effective basic skills development program will result in a measurable change in the student's self concept.

THE SAMPLE

Thirty-four students enrolled in basic skills development classes were used for this study. A fall semester group of eighteen students was followed by a spring semester group of sixteen students. In each case the students selected the class because of their academic needs and their personal obligations

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outside of the college. There was no effort to select the students nor to match them with a control group. This study was self-contained, dealing with self concept growth and academic stimulation.

THE PROCEDURE

The TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE was selected as the objective scale for measuring the change in the student's self concept. This scale acknowledges Abraham Maslow's contention that a positive level of self-esteem is the final prerequisite for self-actualization. Therefore, it is self concept which serves as an index or criterion of self-actualization. The greatest resource in the rehabilitation of any individual is the individual himself. This rehabilitation is a process of helping the individual to utilize and actualize his own potentialities. This scale has a wide variety of studies related to it.

Disadvantages of the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE are that it tries to measure a subjective intangible and that is a verbal paper-and-pencil situation.

As a part of this initial interview, the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE by Dr. William H. Fitts was administered to each student. The basic skills development program at Essex Community College in Baltimore County, Maryland, is identified as Learning Skills - Reading 021. It is a three hour, non-credit, individualized, programmed, laboratory experience. During personal interviews each student is contracted to work toward a <u>self defined</u> resolution of his skill deficiencies as he perceived them.

A copy of this LEARNING SKILLS CONTRACT follows:

BASIC SKILLS CONTRACT

1 Name:

Date:

Phone:

3 Observable behavior which will indicate that the problem no longer exists:

Third level goal:

Second level goal:

First level goal:

2 Observable behavior which indicates that there is a problem:

ORAL CONTRACT:

"I agree to be honest even though at times it may be difficult to do so."

"I agree to be responsible for my behavior when we are together and when I am outside of this interview."

Student signature:

Reinforcers:

_____ factual report

_____ change in feeling and attitude

_____ change in environment

_____ verbal support by the instructor

Follow up:

_____ modify the contract

_____ set a new contract

_____ discontinue the program

The student first affixes his name, the date and his phone number to the upper right hand corner of the Learning Skills Contract. Secondly, the student writes a description of the observable behavior which indicates to him that there is a problem in the space provided. A Reading Specialist can glean a great deal of information from the way a student expresses his feelings about his weaknesses. After describing his problem, the student then moves his attention up the paper to the area numbered three. At this point, the student identifies the observable behavior which will indicate to him that the problem no longer exists. Once again, the Reading Specialist has insight into the student's situation as he sees it and as it exists in relation to the world of reality. With the student, the instructor reads the Oral Contract; discussion may follow and the student signs the contract.

In conference with the student, the instructor evaluates the student's problem and his goal. Easily achievable "middle" goals are assigned to the student by the instructor. These assignments are written into the contract as the first, second and third level goals. Working up the paper, from the problem to the solution has a positive psychological effect.

Reinforcers are discussed between the instructor and the student. More than one reinforcer may be used in a contract. If the decision is to use factual reports as a reinforcer, testing with standardized tests is in order. The instructor should help direct the student to the reinforcers which would be most rewarding to the student. Some students do not do well in testing situations. Counseling relative to the student's change in feeling and attitude may be a rewarding reinforcer. Warmth and understanding can be very helpful to a student with a low self concept. Material rewards are common forms of behavior modification; they may also be very dangerous traps for both the student and the instructor. The instructor needs to stay aware of his limitations and those of the student while trying to help the student become independent.

Verbal support from the instructor may be all the student needs to overcome a history of hostile educational situations. As many honest reinforcers should be used as possible.

Evaluation of the student's contracts was made (1) upon request of the student, (2) as established goals were reached, or (3) on a weekly basis. The conclusion of the evaluation resulted in the establishment of a revised contract or reaffirmation of the existing contract. Personal circumstances, areas of interest, and levels of success were justification for adjustment in the level, speed, scope or even the subject of the student's efforts. This adjustment is recorded in the follow-up area of the contract form. In this way, each contract is terminated before a new contract is undertaken. A student would be working on only one contract at a time. However, the student may terminate a contract at any point in the contract and set forth on a new contract.

Acceptance of the student's evaluation of himself as the focal point for contracting throws the onerous of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the student. Many students have never before been the masters of their areas of learning. The instructor counsels the student as to the possible consequences of his choices; however, the contract is one between equal partners in the educational process.

The instructional method and materials used in this program are not unique. In this study, most of the materials were student course related texts or trade manuals having a high probability of immediate reward and removing the need for transfer learning. The instruction was casual tutoring to an immediate need, or programmed review of tutored skills for the purpose of mastery. The subject of the text or manual was not tutored - the use of the text was tutored. Vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, writing and speed skills were at the base of most tutoring.

Mid-semester course evaluations were rendered by the students and adjustments were made. At the end of the semester the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE was administered again, and an open ended subjective success questionnaire was completed by each student.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation of the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE results were as follows:

(1) The pretest totals for each of the fifteen subtests were determined by adding the results of each of the six items identified within each subtest.

(2) Calculation of the potential growth was accomplished by subtracting the pretest total from 450. (Each item is rated from one to five. There are six items in each of the fifteen subtests.)

(3) The post test totals were determined in the same manner as the pretest totals after the sixteen week instructional period.

(4) Actual growth for each student was ascertained by subtracting the pretest score from the post test score.

(5) Extent of the student's self concept change is rated as a percent of the actual growth score in relation to the potential growth.

RESULTS OF THE FALL CLASS

The percent of growth of the eighteen students in the Fall study ranged from negative 31 to positive 72, a total range of 103 units. Below is a chart indicating the specific figures.

STUDENT	PRE-TEST	POTENTIAL GROWTH	POST TEST	ACTUAL GROWTH	PERCENT CHANGE
1	373	77	402	29	37
2	286	286	247	-39	-1
3	312	138	323	11	8
4	358	92	424	66	72
5	276	174	280	3	3
6	318	132	337	19	14
7	332	118	348	16	16
9	319	319	313	-6	-2
10	367	367	330	-37	-10
11	322	322	298	-24	-7
12	318	318	310	-8	-2
13	358	92	367	9	9
14	337	113	374	37	32
15	357	93	383	26	22
16	287	287	197	-90	-31
17	350	100	355	5	5
18	323	323	312	11	-4

Reports of the open ended subjective success questionnaire were all positive. Each showed a growth in the student's self concept as seen by the student. The change in students' quality point average were also used as elements in the evaluation. Nine students in the study showed quality point averages below that of an average college student. No comparison could be made with the student's own record because this was the student's first semester in college. Eight students in the study showed average college quality point averages even though they had been rated as high risk students when they entered the program. One student showed a quality point average far above the average.

Findings in each of these areas have their greatest meaning when they are placed in relation to each other. These findings follow.

The attitude change for the first student was 37 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I feel that the program has helped me very much because I am now reading 90% more than I was before the program. I liked being able to tell someone something that they didn't know. They would listen and that made me feel great". This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the second student was 2 percent in the negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I have been successful working in my vocabulary book. Before I started working in the book, I could not pronounce words in my reading and now I can." This was the student's first semester in college; an average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the third student was 8 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "I found that this class helped me in my reading and spelling skills. I can

read faster and know what I am reading. I can say words that I could not say before." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the fourth student was 72 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "Through this class my English, art, speech and camping classes were made easier for me. The teacher was a big asset. The output of work was left up to the desires of the student and therefore the class was made a true learning place." This was the student's first semester in college; an above average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the fifth student was 3 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "I feel the program was very well organized. I felt comfortable with the self pacing; it didn't create ar pressures that would cause me to feel rushed or nervous. I will never be an expert speller, but the knowledge gained in this program will be of benefit to me. As a result of the program, I'm much more conscious of my spelling." This was the student's first semester in college; an above average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the sixth student was 14 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I have found success in this program. I have studied vocabulary for many weeks and I have used the words I have learned. My vocabulary has broadened. I also have had time to work on my other classes and to study for tests using new techniques. This course has helped me put my mind toward my education." This was this student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the seventh student in this study was 16 percent in the negative direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "I have been able to learn the reasons why I can spell the words of the English language through the rules of spelling. I have been able to relate this course with the courses needed to help me improve; I improved in Business Law, English and just my everyday life. I thoroughly enjoyed this course very much and I would recommend it to anyone when having a problem in spelling or just not able to comprehend what is being read and to relate it to other subjects". This was the student's first semester in college; an above average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the eighth student was 13 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I found this course very rewarding. I improved my reading rate, my spelling ability and my understanding of grammar. Most of all I learned how to give myself direction, self instruction and evaluation." This was the student's first semester in college; however, the quality point average achieved was far above average.

The attitude change for the ninth student was 2 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "Though I came into this program quite late, I feel it has helped me. I know that most of my problems with reading have to do with outside problems. I will have to keep working with them." This was the student's first semester in college; an average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the tenth student was 10 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I have been able to 'brush-up' on my spelling rules and techniques

through the class. Prior to this course I was making common errors having forgotten my knowledge of spelling rules. The course has also enabled me to increase my vocabulary." This was the student's first semester on campus; an above average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the eleventh student was 18 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I read faster and understand a lot more of what I read." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The twelfth student showed a 6 percent attitude change in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I found it easier to read more and pass tests. I am doing better because in this class my reading speed has improved and my vocabulary has grown." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the thirteenth student was 9 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I feel this program was successful for me. I increased my reading speed by fifty percent. My writing improved." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change of the fourteenth student was 32 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I learned how to spell different types of words and to know their meaning. I learned how to pronounce different words that I had had trouble with, and learned to put these words in good sentences. I liked the way the program was set up; I could work at my own speed. All of the activities were very well constructed and interesting. I enjoyed the class

very much and I feel as though the program has helped me a lot." This was the student's first semester in college; an above average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the fifteenth student was 22 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I feel this course has done me a world of good. The program revealed a whole new world in vocabulary and pronunciation. The books that I used played a great part in my learning of grammar and punctuatior. I am quite sure that I need more brushing up, but now I feel as though I can cope with any academic situation." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the sixteenth student was 31 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "The success I have found in this program is that I couldn't read as well or as fast before." This was the student's first semester in college; an above average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the seventeenth student was 5 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "This class has helped me know how to break words down in syllables so I can pronounce and spell them better. I could not have achieved these things if it were not for the method of instruction." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the eighteenth student was 4 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated,"This program helped me get better in reading. I understand more of what I read; I have learned new words that I never knew before. I feel that we were successful in the program." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

RESULTS OF THE SPRING CLASS

The percent of growth of the seventeen students in the Spring study ranged from negative 16 to positive 48, a range of 64 units. Below is a chart indicating the specific figures.

STUDENT	PRE-TEST	POTENTIAL GROWTH	POST TEST	ACTUAL GROWTH	PERCENT CHANGE
19	297	153	351	54	35
20	243	243	202	-41	-16
21	319	319	302	-17	-5
22	327	123	359	32	26
23	333	333	316	-17	-5
24	283	167	308	25	15
25	322	322	313	-10	-3
26	398	52	423	25	48
27	323	127	331	+8	7
28	334	116	355	21	18
29	375	75	396	21	29
30	366	84	376	10	11
31	385	385	347	-38	-9
32	362	78	395	7.8	23
33	264	186	337	73	40
34	319	131	328	9	7

The attitude change for the nineteenth student was 35 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire, the student stated, "I found that I can read if I am interested in what I'm reading. I read the most I have ever read in my life. In vocabulary, I was surprised at how much I learned. I was more successful in this class than I ever have been in any other class." This was the student's first semester in college; an average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the twentieth student was 16 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire, the student stated, "I am taking a philosophy course along with the vocabulary course this semester. When reading my philosophy I had to keep a dictionary by my side for new words. This vocabulary course helped me become more familiar with new words. Not only did I learn more new words, I gained knowledge through context". A drop of one full point was noted in the student's quality point average; however, the credit load had been increased from the college minimum to above the college average.

The attitude change for the twenty-first student was 5 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire, the student stated, "The success I have gotten from this course will not become apparent right away. As I use my skills more and more each day, I learn the need for them." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the twenty-second student was 26 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire, the student stated, "I learned quite a bit and the enlargement of my vocabulary has helped me in many ways. I just wish I could have started earlier." This was the student's first semester in college; however, the quality point average was

higher, than average.

The attitude change for the twenty-third student was 5 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire, the student stated, "I have learned a lot from this class. It has helped to improve my spelling and my vocabulary. I also have learned to like to look up words in the dictionary so that I get to know them. I have enjoyed the class." An improvement of one full point was made in the student's quality point average.

The attitude change for the twenty-fourth student was 15 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire, the student stated, "This course really did help to improve my vocabulary. I have learned to read more carefully and try harder to work out those words I would have just skipped over before. An increase in quality point average was coupled with a doubling of hours carried during this semester.

The attitude change for the twenty-fifth student was 3 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire, the student stated, "Well at first when I came in I did not know too much because I had not been in school for two years. Since I took this course it has helped me a great deal. If I have any problem with my spelling, I am going to refer to my text and hope I don't forget." This was the student's first semester in college; an above average quality point average was achieved.

The attitude change for the twenty-sixth student was 48 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "I enjoyed the class and feel I learned a lot." The student's quality point average dropped four-tenths of a point during this semester. This was due to two failing grades in the student's first encounter with college science courses.

The attitude change for the twenty-seventh student was 7 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "During the time I have come to this class I have had more time to think about what I want to do to improve my learning skills. At first I worked with my reading skills and then changed over to grammar. I have learned a great deal in grammar and hope to continue. I love this class." This was the student's first semester in college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the twenty-eighth student was 18 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "This is one of the best programs for freshmen. I really enjoyed it. There is an improvement in vocabulary and so it has been a real success for me." This was the student's first semester at college; no comparison of quality point average could be made.

The attitude change for the twenty-ninth student was 29 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire, the student stated, "I feel I have been quite successful in this class this semester. I've learned a lot." The student's quality point average for this semester was a straight "A" while being a full-time student.

The attitude change for the thirtieth student was 11 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire, the student stated, "My success in this course was obtained through speed reading and vocabulary development. The speed reading helped sharpen my reading ability and stimulate my mind. My vocabulary is much improved from the beginning of the semester." This was the student's first semester in college; an above average quality point average was reported.

The attitude change for the thirty-first student was 9 percent in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire, the student stated, "Reading skills have helped me a great deal in many ways this semester. Speed reading, I have found, has enabled me to gain greater knowledge in my other subjects. I have developed a larger vocabulary, but above all I feel that I have gained confidence in myself. I would have been lost without this help." There was no change in the student's quality point average during this semester.

The attitude change for the thirty-second student was 23 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire, the student stated, "The goal I set at the beginning of this course was to increase my vocabulary. I have supplemented the class work with work at home such as reading and crossword puzzles. I feel that alltogether the work I have done with words this semester has helped me a great deal to increase my vocabulary. I feel I have been very successful." The student improved in quality point average while doubled the number of hours carried during this semester.

The attitude change for the thirty-third student was 40 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire, the student stated, "I think that I did reach my goal this semester. I did improve in vocabulary and in grammar much more than in past semesters. The support staff helped me understand things better." The student's quality point average was unchanged this semester.

The attitude change for the thirty-fourth student was 7 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire, the student stated, "I think this class has been very successful in helping me with vocabulary. Pronouncing words has become a bit easier and the tests seem easier." The student's quality point average dropped two-tenths of one point this semester.

SUMMARY

Thirty-four students in Essex Community College, Maryland, were evaluated for (1) self concept growth as shown through pretest and post test with an objective scale, (2) self concept as shown through an open ended subjective questionnaire, and (3) improvement in college wide quality point average after working in a self goalsetting learning support program for basic skills development. Results of the objective self concept were positive. The open ended subjective questionnaire showed a positive attitude on the part of each student. In most cases growth was shown in the student's quality point average. These results support the hypothesis that the self goalsetting contract environment is positive for community college students seeking basic skills development.

The objective self concept scale indicated growth for twenty-five of the thirty-four students studied. Negative growth for the twelve students ranged from 1 percent to 31 percent with a mode of 5 percent, a mean of 5 percent, and a medium of 7.3 percent. The positive growth for the twenty-two students studied ranged from 3 percent to 72 percent; the mode is 7 percent, the mean was 16 percent and the medium of 18 percent. The self goal setting learning support environment lead most students to grow in self concept and the growth was at a moderately high level.

Quality point averages improved for students in the study. Most of the first semester students obtained average, 2 point or C, quality point grades. Most returning students also improved their quality point average from the preceding semester. The quality point average of one student dropped during the semester. Two students dropped in their quality point average, however, they had increased their course load from the previous semester. Another

two students maintained their quality point average. Two other students showed growth in their quality point average while increasing their course load. One student raised the quality point average by one full point while still another received a perfect 4 point quality point average for the semester. Results indicate that the college wide quality point average of the students in the self goal setting learning support program improved markedly from the previous semester.

CONCLUSION

As we learned from our 1976 study, ED-129-394, a measurable postive growth in self concept was achieved with high risk students in a basic skills development program at the community college level, thus supporting the hypothesis. The self goal setting learning support environment can help set the stage for success.

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